MONTEREY NEWS

January 2014
VOLUME XLIV · Number 1

The Town

by Susan Gallant

New Tax Rate

During most of the past year, the accountant's position has been one of constant change. For those of you who haven't been keeping up, the scenario has gone something like this: Last year, Monterey's accountant retired. A new person was hired but was forced to resign due to serious health issues. To keep things going, two of Monterey's previous accountants filled in until someone new was hired. That new person was, and is, Brendon Fletcher. Brendon has been working diligently to get up to speed, reconcile the books with Bethany Mielke, our newly elected town treasurer, and to help Monterey become the well-oiled machine that it's meant to be.

All this change has caused a delay in setting the new tax rate. But thanks to the help of Jim Podolak, Monterey's field advisor for the Massachusetts Bureau of Accounts, the new tax rate has been set, and it has increased. Last year's rate was set at $5.59 on $1,000, and the new rate is now $6.08, an 8.75% increase from the previous year. So someone owning a home assessed at $300,000 will be paying $147 more in property taxes.

The increase is mostly the result of the huge assessment of $1,278,491 levied on Monterey by the regional school district, an 11.64% increase. Monterey's increase was larger than that of any of the other towns the district serves. Also adding to the higher tax rate have been overages in expenses, totaling $79,000, as well as the unexpected increase in funds going to the Wilson McLaughlin House.

Mary Kate Jordan

Winter scene at Stevens Lake

Monterey School

Dick Tryon, along with Dennis Lynch and Steven Weisz, joined the December 7 Select Board meeting to discuss their concerns about funding for the Monterey School, in light of the recent survey on the school.

Dick began by saying that Monterey has been paying into the regional school district since the 1950s, and the district should be paying or at least significantly contributing to a new school here in town. In response, Muriel Lazzarini said that the Select Board is considering various options for funding, including asking the school committee to contribute, especially since the district should have been paying for

the upkeep of the current school building, which it hasn't been doing.

Dennis Lynch had questions about the possibility of using the Wilson McLaughlin House for the new school. As it turns out, this suggestion had been made but rejected at the time because of concerns that contributors to the Wilson McLaughlin House might feel that their donations were being redirected toward a project they did not necessarily support. Dennis also wanted to know when survey results would be posted. Survey results will be made known after January 23, the deadline for survey submissions.

The discussion then turned to the building that currently houses the Monterey School. Steven Weisz asked why renovating the existing school is not an option, saying that even if it isn't economically feasible, it's still an option, and he believes that others would like to keep the existing building in consideration. He also asked to review the school building facility report from a few years ago, as well as Scott's assessment of the existing building. In conclusion, he suggested having the Finance Committee put together some figures to see the impact a new school would have on town finances.

Monterey West-Side Cell Tower Activated!

The cell tower on the west side of Monterey near the junction of Routes 23 and 57 was activated in the last week of December, so at least some parts of Monterey now have the long-awaited cell phone service. We now get three-bar connection down in the valley on River Road, and folks on the high ground near the firehouse say they are getting four or five bars; however, down the hill in the center of town the connection drops off to about two bars. And some people on the east side of town a couple of miles or so from town center report getting two bars.

—Will Marsh

Ash Trees to Dust?

At the end of November, Dick Tryon joined the Select Board meeting to voice concern about the poor condition of the ash trees on New Marlborough Road. Select Board member Scott Jenssen then drove down New Marlborough Road, as well as a number of other roads around town, and confirmed Dick's observations that Monterey's ash trees are indeed in rough shape. As it turns out, these trees are being attacked by the emerald ash borer (EAB), a tiny green beetle that first showed up in Michigan in 2002. Since then, the insect has been responsible for the death and decline of tens of millions of ash trees throughout the United States, from the Midwest to New York State and Massachusetts and south to Tennessee. This rapid infestation has resulted in a quarantine order for all of Berkshire County, which began on March 1, 2013.

According to a February 21, 2013, press release from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, "The quarantine order means that certain products will be regulated from moving outside the regulated area, including all hardwood firewood (any piece of wood smaller than 48 inches), all ash nursery stock, and any ash lumber that has not been treated." The entire press release can be found at massforestalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/ 2013/02/PR-DCR-EABQuarantine-2-21-13.pdf. To report an infestation, go to massnrc.org/pests/eabreport.htm. More information about the EAB can be found at www.emeraldashborer.info/#sthash.f5yFvMd5.dpbs.

Those of us who use firewood can do our part to control the infestation by buying local firewood and burning it locally. In other words, do not buy firewood in Berkshire County and then move it to eastern Massachusetts or anywhere else outside the county because that will spread the infestation.

Police Report

The Monterey Police Department saw the following activity over the past month, as reported by Police Chief Gareth Backhaus:

- A llama, reported lost on Norwalk Acres, was later found.
- A Main Rd. resident reported receiving harassing phone calls.
- A car was stolen from Main Rd. Gareth wants to remind us all to not only lock our cars but especially to not leave our car keys in unlocked cars; although our

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fellow townspeople may be trustworthy, you never know who might be passing through town looking for an opportunity.

- Disabled motor vehicles on Main Rd.
- False alarms on Main Rd., Woodland Dr., and Art School Rd.
- Game camera stolen on Sandisfield Rd.
- A logging truck accident occurred on Hupi Rd.
- A dispute between neighbors was called in on Mt. Hunger Rd.
- Medical calls on Tyringham and Main Rds.
- CO detector alarm sounded at a residence on Woodland Dr.
- A bus got stuck on Chestnut Hill Rd.
- Complaints about a barking dog on Art School Rd. resulted in the dog being brought inside.
- A dog was found and returned to its owner on Hupi Rd.
- Well-being check on Chestnut Hill Rd.
- Cars were towed from Main and Blue Hill Rds. because they impeded snow plowing. Cars cannot be parked on the edge of the road, especially during snowstorms. If residents can't get into their driveways, they can park at town hall. Also, operators of private snowplows cannot push snow across or into the middle of the road.

January 28 Meeting on Major Town Projects

With all the ongoing, yet divergent, discussions about such major projects as library renovations, Monterey School relocation, and Wilson McLaughlin House repairs, the Select Board has decided it might be time to gather all the key players involved in these various projects, along with the general public, to begin discussions, offer ideas and suggestions, and possibly combine resources so that all of us as a town can work together productively and efficiently. That meeting will take place on Tuesday, January 28, at 7 p.m. at town hall and will include the library trustees, the Friends of Wilson McLaughlin House, the highway department director, Monterey's school committee representative, and the Monterey School discussion committee. This meeting is open to the public, and all are encouraged to attend.

Steve Graves

The Monterey Skating rink behind the fire station got off to its earliest start in recent memory on Dec 15 thanks to cold weather, the Monterey Park Commission, many volunteers, and special insulating sawdust from Chuck Wyman and Son in Hartsville. Adult pickup, soft puck hockey games are Tuesdays and Thursdays at 7 p.m., and Sundays at 9:30 a.m. Free youth hockey clinics/games for all levels ages 9–14 are Saturdays from 9–10:30 a.m. with Coach Peter Poirier. Family skating is every afternoon 12–6 p.m., and the annual Monterey Community Skate is planned for February.

New Library Trustee

Library trustee Kenn Basler informed the Select Board that MaryPaul Yates agreed to take the place of Lois Storch, who recently resigned as a trustee. The Select Board unanimously approved her appointment.

Joint Pole Hearing

The December 16 joint pole hearing for Blue Hill Road, attended by a representative from National Grid, began with some of the residents of the road expressing dissatisfaction with the quality of service they're getting from Verizon. Other issues of concern to homeowners had to do with the number of large, healthy trees slated to come down in order to install the necessary poles.

After hearing these remarks, the Select Board suggested postponing the meeting until it had more information and a visit could be made to the site. Select Board members also agreed that, besides National Grid, a representative from Verizon should attend the next meeting. ॐ

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Dec. 6 Special Town Meeting

Only twenty or so of Monterey's registered voters attended the special town meeting held on December 6, but that number was sufficient to officially approve the issues at hand.

Article 1, asking authorization for easements on Route 23 to allow for work to be done on that road was approved unanimously. Article 2, which asked voters to approve an amendment to Article 16 of the Bylaws, regarding tax exemptions for retired firefighters, was also approved unanimously, as was Article 3, which would allow the transfer of $2,800 from free cash to the Council on Aging to cover a bookkeeping error.

Articles 4 and 5, authorizing a feasibility study for renovating and expanding the library and authorizing the trustees to apply for state grants for such a project were also unanimously approved.

Articles 6 and 7 asked the town to vote to amend the zoning bylaws by adding a new section on regulations for large-scale, ground-mounted solar photovoltaic systems and to approve those regulations. These regulations generated some discussion, with voters concerned that regulations that were too strict might discourage the building of this alternative power source. As a result, by a vote 11 in favor and 8 opposed, item 3, the height restriction, of section 7.8.8 was eliminated, and the amended article was approved by a vote of 17 to 3.

The final article, Article 8, which called for a 17-month moratorium on the establishment of a medical marijuana site in Monterey so that the town might have the opportunity to address the impact such a facility would have on the town, was vigorously and unanimously rejected. (Dave would be proud.)

—Susan Gallant

My Turn

Solar Bylaws & Big Questions about Monterey's Future

On Friday, December 6, I attended a lively special town meeting that addressed several issues, chiefly the proposed solar photovoltaic system bylaws. I came to meeting with two lists: one of questions and clarifications and one of proposed amendments to the bylaws. Unfortunately, the town voted to call the question before I proposed my amendments and before I finished clarifying the bylaws on a point-by-point basis. Due to the nature of calling the question, I had no opportunity to argue against it. I was disappointed by the haste to move on, considering that these regulations will have a major effect on the town and its evolution during the coming decades. They are part of a larger question facing the Town of Monterey.

Do we believe in the freedom to develop one's own property, with some reasonable environmental and public health restrictions? Or do we believe in the freedom from development? Public discourse in Monterey seems to tilt increasingly toward the latter. I understand the appeal of freedom from development. I was extremely displeased when development marred the beautiful view from Hunger Mountain, located in the eastern parcel of Beartown State Forest that abuts my family's property. But, fundamentally, I believe in the freedom to develop one's own property, with some reasonable restrictions. And the owner's freedom to develop his or her property was greater than my preference for a perfect view.

What energy resources can property owners develop in Monterey? We don't have natural gas fracking that fouls the water supply and contributes to seismic instability. We don't have oil drilling that fouls the water supply and illuminates the night sky with flares. We don't have coal mining that fouls the water supply and slices off mountaintops. We don't have capacity for industrial wind or industrial hydropower, greener technologies that nonetheless involve tradeoffs such as mountaintop blasting and aquatic ecosystem disruption. Instead, we have plentiful solar energy, the greenest source of power with the fewest external effects and the most potential for integration into homes and small businesses.

Consider a solar-powered microbrewery, a plausible small business in Monterey. To install one-quarter acre of ground-mounted solar panels for the sole purpose of powering the microbrewery, this business would have to jump through many hoops that provide no public benefit and serve only to deter potential entrepreneurs. These hoops include 75-foot setbacks from all boundaries, compared to only 25-foot setbacks for a residence.

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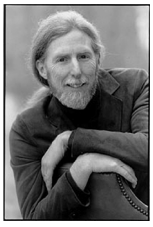

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A bond at the time of construction large enough to provide for the dismantling of all panels and related structures. One hundred dollars per day in late fees for a detailed annual report. Five-hundred-foot setbacks from the borders of any property eligible for the Register of Historic Places. At the special town meeting, the Planning Board stated that they had made no study of how much land this would leave usable for medium-scale solar installations after the bylaw passage. Perhaps not any. Thankfully, voters approved Scott Jenssen's amendment to eliminate an arbitrary 15-foot height limit. But onerous obstacles now exist.

The Planning Board also stated that the primary purpose of these solar bylaws is to protect property values. Section 7.8.8 #2 requires that solar owners use vegetation to visually screen solar installations from abutting properties. Section 7.8.9 #1 requires that solar owners shield lighting from abutting properties. When these two measures alone require solar installations to be virtually invisible to their neighbors, why do the bylaws need additional regulations to protect property values? They don't. The further regulations concerning bond, setbacks, and siting are a poison pill for medium-scale solar in Monterey.

I have lived in Monterey my whole life, and I want this town to be the best town in Berkshire County to start a farm, a small business, and a family. We are at something of a crossroads in Monterey regarding development. On one road, we can build on our strengths to become a more vibrant and diverse community. On the other, we can let excessive concerns about character and aesthetics consign us to less long-term vitality. Most voters agree that gigantic solar farms with thousands of panels are not a great fit for Monterey. But medium-scale projects integrated with small businesses such as the microbrewery in my example should be promoted, not quashed. I encourage everyone to keep the future of our town in mind and stand for reasonable regulation, not overregulation.

—Jonah Carlson

Monterey Community Center News

Construction work began December 30 on the first phase of actual renovation!

Friends of Wilson McLaughlin House (FWMH) accepted the bid from and signed a contract with the low bidder for this work, Kronenberger & Sons Restoration, Middletown, Connecticut, a three-generation family business with decades of experience in restoration work, including work on many buildings of just the age and style as the Wilson McLaughlin House. So in January you will see the house shored up, the foundation repaired and strengthened with concrete, some post-and-beam repairs accomplished, and a new subfloor assembly constructed for the main floor.

We are very excited to be embarking on the rebuilding, and we are grateful for all the support from the town in approving our request for funds from town meeting, as well as all the private donations that we have received and the fantastic volunteer forces that have turned out to do some fairly unpleasant demolition and cleanup tasks. At the end of the year we received a large anonymous donation in recognition of our continued work on the community's behalf. This is quite gratifying!

Meanwhile the committee is working on two major undertakings this winter. First, we are making plans and decisions with our architect and engineer for the next big construction phase, framing up and closing in the structure, which we hope to be able to put out to bid by mid to late winter, so that work can commence in the spring. But doing that work will be contingent upon our having the funds to pay for it, which leads to our second wintertime project. We will once again be applying for a matching-funds grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council Capital Facilities Fund. Since this involves a long and complicated grant application, we are marshaling all our forces to gather the requisite information and present it properly.

As always, we welcome your input and your donations (fully tax-deductible), which you can make online at our website, www.ccmonterey.org. Look there for information about the project and the people involved in creating this community facility. Of course, you can always contact any of the committee members for more information as well.

Thanks!

—Joe Baker for FWMH

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Burning Permits in Monterey

This year the Monterey Fire Department will be using an online application for burning permits. They will be available from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. daily, because of DEP regulations, when weather conditions allow for open burning. The DEP requires fires to be started after 10 a.m. and be extinguished by 4 p.m. for air quality purposes. Open burning season is from January 15, 2014, to May 1, 2014.

To obtain a permit go to the website http://www.bcburnpermits.com/, read the regulations, and follow the section titled "**How to obtain a permit."** If you cannot obtain a permit online, you can call 528-1734 and follow the prompts. This is also only available from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Make sure you print out your permit and keep it with you when burning.

- You may only burn brush, no leaves, grass, hay, stumps, building debris, or any other material.
- All open burning must be a minimum of 75 feet from a building or structure.
- Burning is allowed only from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Any open fire must be attended at all times by the permit holder.
- No person shall set, maintain, or increase a fire in open air except by permit issued by the Fire Department.
- You must be 18 years or older to apply for a permit and tend the fire.
- You must have a means to extinguish an open fire completely at the end of the day or if requested by the Fire Department.
- The Fire Department can refuse or cancel a permit at any time.
- Open burning season is from **January 15 to May 1**.

Mary Kate Jordan

Winter sunrise, Stevens Lake

From the Tax Collector

The fiscal year 2014 Real Estate and Personal Property bills for the third quarter have been mailed and are due February 3, 2014. If you do not receive your bill, please contact the tax collector's office (413-528-1443 x117). The fourth quarter tax bills will be mailed in late March and are due May 1, 2014. If you wish, you may pay both the February and May amounts at this time.

Please direct all questions regarding assessments, abatement applications, and personal property taxes to the Board of Assessors, PO Box 488, Monterey, MA 01245 (413-528-1443 x115). Abatement applications must be received in the Assessors' Office by February 3, 2014.

To accommodate taxpayers who want the convenience of paying Monterey Real Estate and Personal Property taxes online, an online payment option is available. To pay your tax, you must have your current bill and checkbook/credit card in hand. Log on to www.montereyma.gov and click on Pay Real Estate Taxes Online. You will need to enter your current bill number and the current bill year (2014). The bank will assess a minimal fee of $0.25 per transaction. MasterCard, Visa, and Discover credit cards will be accepted. Please note that the credit card company will charge the taxpayer a fee for the service. This fee is not assessed by or paid to the Town of Monterey.

—Mari Enoch
Monterey Tax Collector

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Taxpayers' Corner
The Wilson-McLaughlin House

In 1996, the Town of Monterey voted to accept a gift from the estate of Edith Wilson that included a 185-year-old house and 28.6 acres of land on the corner of Route 23 and New Marlborough Road for municipal and recreation use.

With this gift came a quandary for the town: The centuries-old farmhouse was in poor shape and unfit for municipal use, which requires meeting a much stricter and more costly set of building and safety codes, including ADA accessibility.

For eight years, a group of residents kept the farmhouse from falling into irreversible disrepair. Then, in late 2004, according to the Monterey Community Center website, this committee "adopted the plan of forming a private, non-profit Massachusetts corporation which could raise funds privately from donations and grants to create the Community Center without requiring town funds raised through taxation, which had always been the major stumbling block."

The following year, Friends of Wilson McLaughlin House, Inc., a nonprofit 501(c)(3), was incorporated; the town voted unanimously at the May 7, 2005, annual meeting to lease the house to FWMH to restore and maintain the building for municipal use; and the Lease and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)—upon which the Lease is dependent—between FWMH and the town were signed.

The nonprofit's Form 990-EZ tax returns, which were made public beginning in 2010, do not show how much money was raised in 2005, but between 2006 and 2011, a total of only $62,234.96 was raised from gifts and fundraisers, not nearly enough to bring the project to completion. In fact, between 2007 and 2009, a mere $1,620 was raised in contributions, and FWMH did not host a single revenue-producing fundraising event.

Then, on March 19, 2012—nearly seven years after signing the MOU and Lease—FWMH came to the Select Board and, according to the minutes, made a request to "appropriate $10,000 to use towards the renovation of the building to a community center."

But wait a minute. What about the terms of the MOU ("to raise money by contributions and through civic events"), and the promise of the FWMH ("[to] raise funds *privately . . . without requiring town funds raised through taxation*" [italics mine])?

Here's what happened: The MOU and the promise were ignored, and the following week, "The Select Board approved putting it on the warrant and it will be noted that the Finance Committee does not support this request," and then, at the 2012 annual town meeting, *despite* the Finance Committee's disapproval, the appropriation was passed.

The question now arises: how was this possible, when the town vote of 2005 to lease the house to FWMH was made expressly because the town *did not want to use taxpayers' dollars to build a community center*? That MOU was still binding in 2012, and remains binding today, and yet the Select Board, by putting the request to appropriate taxpayers' dollars onto the warrant, effectively breached the contract.

Moreover, if the Select Board had done due diligence, they would have discovered that the Lease provides a solution to the dilemma in which FWMH found itself; namely, a provision under the heading "Early Termination of Lease" that states: "Lessee may terminate this Lease by giving 60 days notice to Lessor, should it become evident that for the reason of insufficient funding the project should not proceed."

In other words, the town had wisely provided protection against this very possibility—that the FWMH might fail to raise sufficient funds to complete the project—and the proper action the Select

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Board should have taken in March 2012 was to terminate the Lease, not breach it by offering up taxpayers' dollars.

This may seem like a harsh response after seven years of insufficient fundraising—and the Select Board simply could have refused the nonprofit's request to use taxpayers' dollars—but instead those dollars have now been put at risk in several critical ways.

First, FWMH is now responsible for expending public dollars. Municipal building projects are notoriously difficult and prone to overruns even when professionally managed by town officials. This was the point of the MOU: that the risk would fall on private donors, not taxpayers. Now taxpayers' dollars are being expended by volunteers, not experienced town officials.

Second, there is absolutely no guarantee that the project will ever be completed, but the Lease allows FWMH to terminate by mutual agreement "at any time for any other reason(s)." This means the town might be handed back a half-finished project on short notice, and taxpayers' dollars would be lost when the building was subsequently razed.

Finally, the Bylaws of FWMH were adopted in February of 2005 without a dissolution clause. Only fourteen months later, in April of 2006, were the Bylaws amended to allow the corporation to dissolve by a majority vote of the board. Where will their assets go? They will be "conveyed" to any number of nonprofits. So, if FWMH dissolves, "whether voluntarily, involuntarily, or by operation of the law," taxpayers' dollars *will not be returned to the town* but given over to one of any number of nonprofits completely unrelated to the community center, and possibly even to a nonprofit outside Monterey.

In other words, your unexpended tax dollars will simply be gone. Forever.

One would think that the violation of the MOU and the extreme risk the Select Board took with taxpayers' dollars in 2012 would be enough to prevent any more money being put at risk, but on February 11, 2013, FWMH returned to the board once again for even more money and, according to the Select Board minutes, "The WMH request of $30,000 elicited a discussion and it was determined that the Select Board is not united on this request, it will have to be defended by members of the WMH Committee at Town Meeting."

What does *that* mean? The Select Board is the author of the warrant. If they did not vote to put the request on the warrant, it should not have gone on the warrant. And why did they change their mind from the prior year?

Even more outrageous, at town meeting a member of the Finance Committee moved to *increase* the request to $45,000, thus raising the total amount of taxpayers' monies put at risk by town officials to $55,000!

How was it possible that the same Finance Committee that argued *against* such an appropriation a year before suddenly not only approved such an expenditure but increased taxpayers' exposure by half? And by what reasoning did *their* official opinion change so that they went from trying to protect taxpayers' dollars to giving it away in grossly larger amounts? This seems unintelligible, to say the least.

Most critically, both Boards have now dishonored the town vote of 2005—which has been the only town referendum on the Wilson-McLaughlin house—and trampled on our democratic process on behalf of a desperate private entity, causing an utterly perverse situation at two town meetings in which taxpayers' dollars were offered to bail out private donors to the project, and those private donors to the project were given the opportunity to vote to protect their investment at the expense of taxpayers.

And the bleeding is not over, folks. If the community center ever gets built,

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FWMH is additionally obligated to provide for its maintenance. Again, from its own website and in its own words, the nonprofit states: "At the [2005 town] meeting we requested and received town support for leasing the property while we raise the required funds to rework the building into a Community Center for artistic, cultural, educational and social activities, *and to create a maintenance endowment for the center's ongoing support*" [italics mine]. And on another of its web pages it states: "We are committed to raising additional funds following this campaign for operation and maintenance costs."

So—if FWMH does not raise a sufficient endowment, will the town also be expected to pick up this bill? When will risky public funding for this private enterprise end? At $200,000? $300,000? And has any reliable budget even been formalized for either the project or its endowment?

In my opinion, the FWMH, its supporters, and town officials need to honor the MOU, instead of disingenuously claiming that the MOU does not explicitly exclude public funding, as was said by some at the 2013 town meeting. That is a very slippery slope to go down when the Monterey Community Center website explicitly states FWMH will "raise funds privately from donations and grants to create the Community Center without requiring town funds raised through taxation" (see http://www.ccmonterey.org/plans.htm).

I signed that MOU and Lease as a Select Board member, and I continue to support the contract as it was intended—as an opportunity town residents have given FWMH to renovate the Wilson house with *private* donations and fundraising events *at their own risk*.

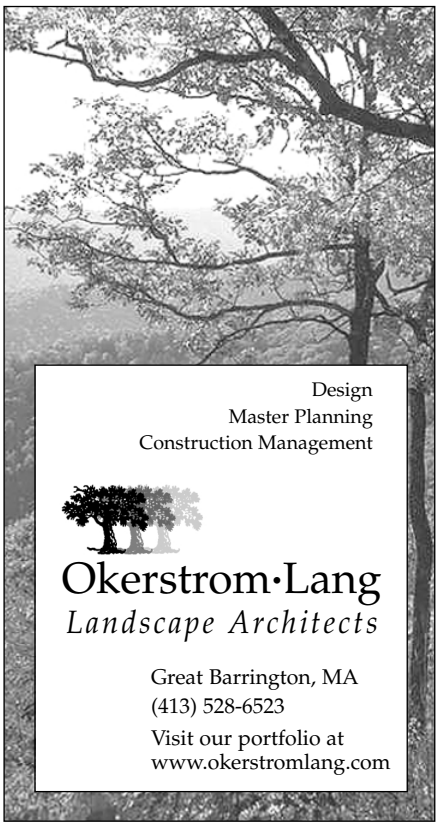
Beyond the misuse of taxpayers' dollars, we should ask the question that prompted the agreement in the first place. Do we need a community center? The public response in 2005 was no, which is why the town leased the farmhouse to a small group who thought otherwise. FWMH's call for an expensive building in Monterey to house "artistic, cultural, educational and social activities" still seems redundant. The library's Knox room hosts art shows, a sewing circle, and book groups; the Monterey Church hosts community dinners, lectures, and music performances, and could certainly host art and educational activities; Gould Farm has hosted basket weaving classes; the Firehouse has hosted fitness classes, and the pavilion hosts innumerable large gatherings; even the General Store displays art.

I wish the FWMH luck, as I did in 2005, but nearly twenty years after accepting Edith Wilson's gift, there is still no reason for adding to taxpayers' shoulders the heavy tax burden of another municipal building in a town this size.

In any case, to help the town focus on this issue, I have taken out a Citizens' Petition, to be submitted to the Select Board for inclusion on the 2014 annual town meeting warrant, to amend the third paragraph of the Memorandum of Understanding between the town and FWMH in order to provide absolute clarity of intent by adding the word "private" in the pertinent phrase as follows: "to raise money by *PRIVATE* contributions and through civic events."

That's what voters intended when they approved the 2005 town meeting article, it's what FWMH promises on its own website, and I encourage registered voters who wish to sign this petition and help collect signatures to contact me by email at montereytaxpayers@outlook.com or by mail at PO Box 463. I also encourage second-home owners and other nonresident taxpayers—who cannot vote but who pay the majority of our taxes—to write the Select Board or the *Monterey News* and express their opinion on this very important matter.

—Jonathan Sylbert



Who's Who in Monterey
Steve Weisz

Impossible. That's what people assumed. Park Slope, Brooklyn, was a lost cause, and this neighborhood was its epitome. It was because of the bar, everyone knew. El Sombrero Rojo was a dump, surrounded by a fence full of bumper-level dents and cracks thanks to drivers, drunk, who'd put it in drive instead of reverse. Worse, the bar wasn't going anywhere, everyone knew. It was as beat up, but also as immovable, as that fence.

But then Steve bought the building, discovered that El Sombrero Rojo had long been without a lease, and evicted the bar. He recruited a puppet theater from elsewhere in Brooklyn to move into the space. Twenty-five years later, Puppet Works is still there, and the neighborhood, like all of Park Slope, is transformed.

Impossible. That was the prevailing attitude about Ossining, New York. The downtown was dead, every building empty, even the Barlow Block building, so beautiful, the anchor of Main Street. It was the same old story: strip malls and big box stores had "done in" the downtown. So, the Federal Resolution Trust Corporation was about to take action, to take into its holdings, this and some other buildings in Ossining, and put them into the pool for large-scale, nationwide auctions.

But then Steve got word of this, through his real estate attorney, who

Liz Goodman

knew Steve had a soft spot for historic preservation and adaptive reuse. With just forty-eight hours left before the properties were lost to the federal trust, Steve managed to come up with the 10 percent down he needed to become the owner of Barlow Block.

To get funding for restoration was tougher. The city leadership was lethargic, defeated. Banks were stubborn in their lack of confidence in the downtown. As long as the whole area looked dead, it would stay dead.

But that was something that could be remedied with a trip to Woolworth's. After removing the boards covering the empty windows, Steve bought huge panes of glass to lean into the frames and rolls of vinyl shades to hang halfway open to make these buildings, and indeed the downtown, appear "alive."

More significant was his establishing the Alliance for Downtown Ossining, a nonprofit that is still at work. ADO started the downtown Christmas-tree-lighting ceremony, sponsored an art gallery featuring the work of local artists (including those serving time in the state prison, Sing Sing), and convinced the city to come up with a master plan. The city began its fifteen-year crawl back to life.

Impossible. That's what many in Fort Myers, Florida, believed. The real estate boom, now gone bust, would leave the city a hollow shell. But Steve found himself spending too much time there not to get involved. Working as a private investigator reuniting adult adoptees with their birth parents, he slept as often in a motel in Fort Myers as he did back home on the Upper West Side.

Fort Myers, he mused, "was like Ossining with palm trees." And he would quit it as unwillingly as he did Ossining. Long after the most profitable pieces of the private investigative agency were sold off to Ancestry.com, Steve continued to employ his staff in the same old spirit of not giving up. And, not coincidentally, Fort Myers, like Ossining, is making a comeback.

"Impossible" is something of siren song to Steve—though I think he might be on some sort of intermission from all that. The room in which we gather for this interview, a living room of wood and glass and inviting furnishings, is impossible only in its comfortable perfection. The neighborhood in which he lives in Monterey is in no perceptible need of restoration. A log cabin at the bend of Bidwell Road, Steve's home is warm in the winter from the wood stove and (I imagine) cool in the summer from

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its proximity to Lake Garfield. Whatever redeeming might need to be done here is certainly beyond my notice.

But who knows? This has been home to him for just a little over a year, though he bought the house in 2010, sure he would use it during the summer and on occasional weekends throughout the year.

Born Steven Jay Weisz in Queens, NY, to Thomas and Goldie Weisz, he and his parents moved to Fair Lawn, NJ, when he was two years old. His father continued to commute into the city to work as a stockbroker while his mother stayed home to raise Steve and his two younger siblings. Steve's family was active in the newly formed Conservative synagogue, and he was a Cub Scout and a member of the 4-H club.

It was, by Steve's account, a typical suburban childhood, though two early influences stand out to him as exceptional—his chapter of the 4-H club and his grandfather, a skilled carpenter. From him, Steve gained an appreciation for things well built and carefully tended to, and from the 4-H club he gained experience in historic preservation, as one of the major projects his chapter took on was the restoration of a historic home in Fair Lawn. (Notice, please, the set of Lincoln Logs on the bookshelves behind Steve as he speaks.)

After attending the public schools of Fair Lawn, Steve matriculated at the University of Michigan, earning a degree in Industrial Psychology. But around his graduation, his father approached him. No longer a stockbroker, Thomas, with his sister Rose, now ran a small company manufacturing jewelry to be sold at Zales, Macy's, Dillard's, and the like. But Rose had recently received a cancer diagnosis and was embarking on treatment that would keep her from work. Thomas needed help, and he asked Steve if he would move back east and fill in for his Aunt Rose.

He agreed to this, buying an apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan and reporting for work in Midtown, though he knew nothing of the gem trade and this would be his purview, buying the gems to be set in the jewelry they would manufacture. The four distributors that supplied their gems, had long been doing so; it would be impossible for Steve to gain enough expertise to deal with them as an equal.

Impossible: how could Steve resist? Instead, he explained to each distributor that *he knew* he knew little of this trade, that he knew *they knew* he knew little of this trade, and that to pretend otherwise would be foolish. But this he also knew, that he could learn, that he *would* learn. And then, once he knew what he needed to know, if he discovered that any of them had exploited his lack of knowledge, they would never do business together again. Three dealt honorably with Steve; the one that did not was closed out, and eventually shut down all together.

Rose never returned to her work, the cancer taking her within four months of her starting treatment. So Steve stayed with the company for four years until his father retired and sold it off. It wasn't an easy decision: Thomas took seriously his responsibility to his employees, most of whom, like himself, were immigrants to the U.S. It was a seriousness that Steve would later take with him to Fort Myers, where he would find himself employing as many as his father had.

Then came Park Slope, and then came Ossining, each a train ride away from where he continued to live in Manhattan. Tucked in there somewhere is a real-estate-management business Steve owned and operated, and an occasional ski trip to the Berkshires, one of which landed him in a borrowed home on Hupi Road. Then came Fort Myers. And then came the 2008 crash, which resettled Steve back in New York.

What to do with himself? His recently sold business and long-ago-sold real estate made it so he had no pressing financial need to get back to work. But how long could someone so attracted to the impossible sit and do nothing?

The woman he was dating at the time was an actress whose frustration at so much rejection had her frustrated that Steve couldn't relate. So she challenged him: go on some auditions and see how it feels.

Armed now with headshots and plenty of time to show up for auditions that could last all day, Steve took up the challenge. And, as you might have guessed, he started getting some callbacks. He filled a void, he explains; he met a need in the market. No middle-aged actors were willing to deign to play the part of Doorman #2: they'd all been at it too long, needed money too

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badly, or had played roles too much better than that to want to go back. But not so Steve: he had nothing at stake, other than the relationship that was starting to tatter. Plus, he had the uniforms, had begun to collect them. And the guy showing up to audition for Policeman #3 already wearing an actual police uniform is, let's face it, gonna get the part.

Many, many times, Steve has gotten the part. A police sergeant in an episode of *Ironside* and Made in *Jersey*, a driver in *The Corrections* and on *Person of Interest*, a recurring butler on the TV show *Deception*, a contented consumer of Cheerios on the back of its box: Steve's handsome face shows up everywhere! Kevin Bacon's got nothing on this guy!

The good news for us is that he's slowly becoming ours. He has recently come to the quite surprising decision to move to Monterey, to visit New York from time to time, rather than the other way around. He did so after challenging himself to spend a whole month here in the summer and then nearly a whole winter here; and he found that he misses Monterey more when in the city than he misses the city when in Monterey.

To be certain, the city still holds some attractions: cell service, food delivery, being able to have more than one drink while out to dinner. (But who knows? Maybe he'll get a subway system built here.) But these are of less value to him now than things like the Monterey Coffee Club, the General Store, the fine dining in Great Barrington—the surprising mix of quaint and avant-garde.

But don't fool yourself into thinking this is some sort of retirement. Already, Steve has founded the Lake Garfield Facebook page and become involved with exploring creative options for the one-room schoolhouse in town. ("Impossible!" you say? Say it louder so he can hear.) He's also interested in the countywide Train Campaign. Adaptive reuse, as it's called…

This perhaps describes Steve most of all. Having retained something of the immigrant that his grandparents actually were, having learned entrepreneurialism from forebears who played life as the long game that it is and succeeded, Steve's intermission, I imagine, will be a short one. I, for one, lean forward to see what comes next.

—Liz Goodman

Personal Notes

Congratulations to John Heffernan, son of Esther and John Heffernan of Mt. Hunger Road, Monterey, who has a new book out, *Elementary Robotics: Sustaining the Natural Engineering Instincts of Children*, which develops a curriculum for teaching robotics in elementary schools. John developed the curriculum and wrote the book because he saw that the natural interest young children have in engineering and building, evidenced by their love of sandcastles, blocks, and fairy houses, is not being addressed in normal elementary school curriculums. He is currently the Technology Coordinator for the Williamsburg, Massachusetts, elementary schools. We in Monterey know John for the very popular robotics workshops for children that he has presented at the Monterey Library the last two summers.

Please send your personal notes to the editor for inclusion in the News.

Town Skating Party and Chili Cook-off Feb. 17

Don't forget the annual Skating Party at the firehouse pavilion on Monday, February 17, from 1–3 p.m., sponsored by the Monterey Park Commission.

Music will be provided by DJ Dreggs, Hot cocoa and hot dogs will be available as will fun for all.

New this year to the skating party is the addition of Monterey's first Annual Chili Cook-off. Want to enter your chili?

Attention Chili Lovers

Here is what we are asking for from prospective entrants:

- Must register with Emily Johnson at 528-1443 ext. 113 no later than February 11.
- Must include description of chili, its ingredients and its fire rating from 1–10.
- Must be at least 10 cups, enough to give tastings to all who attend the event.
- Must be in electric croc pot or Sterno-fired chaffing dish.
- Must be set up by 2 p.m. on Monday, February 17, at the firehouse pavilion.

The Parks Department will supply electricity, utensils, paper ware, and tables for entrants and will choose impartial judges who will decide the winner.

All of this in addition to the Annual Skating Party powered by the winter with help from DJ Dreggs spinning tunes, hot coco, hot dogs, and, yes, we will offer water to put out any fires that have started in one's mouth.

—Monterey Park Commission

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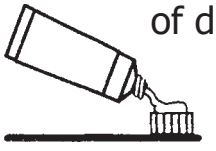

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Route 23 Monterey

Ongoing at The Knox Gallery

In January

In the Details, a diverse and interesting exhibit of 68 very small works by 39 artists, opened in the Knox Gallery/Monterey Library on December 6 and can be viewed during library hours through February 1.

Our community boasts a rich population of active artists—from serious amateurs to those with work in prominent international museum and private collections. We are pleased that our broadest array of contributors to date is represented in *In the Details*. The work of Monterey artists predominates**;** Great Barrington, Lenox, New Marlborough, Egremont, as well as Connecticut and New York are represented. Diversity is likewise evidenced in the type of work. While small scale creates commonality, the exhibit features all sorts of materials and mediums: sculpture, painting, prints, multimedia, and everything in between.

Plan for Next Community Exhibit

We encourage all friends and artists to get ready to think about submissions for our community exhibit for the summer! We will unveil general parameters for the show in the February *Monterey News*. Please stay tuned.

What's Next

Pauline Nault: Mere Color Moves opens February 7 to headline our exciting lineup for winter 2014.

Please remember that artists donate to the Friends of the Library 20 percent of sales made through the Knox Gallery. Please support the Knox Gallery and the Monterey Library!

—MaryPaul Yates

Jan. 15 Community Potluck Features Barbara Swann with a Story from Monterey's Past

Jim Bracken's reading of two of his stories at the December Potluck was very well received, with many of us relating to some of the details of his childhood. Many thanks to him for sharing with us, and I think we would all like to hear more!

For the January Potluck, Barbara Swann will discuss one of Monterey's most famous and meaningful romantic episodes. It involves two of its long ago families, sadly no longer resident here (though there are descendants elsewhere) and the Monterey Church. From its use by the son of a local Revolutionary War hero to its use by a later Montereyan, we are able to explore, explain, and eulogize the romantic background of one of the most beloved artifacts in the collection of the Monterey Historical Society, now sadly in storage but evocative of happier times.

The next Monterey Community Potluck Dinner will be held on Wednesday, January 15, at 6 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall of the Monterey Meetinghouse. Please bring a dish to share with a serving utensil and a place setting and silverware for yourself. Everyone is welcome.

—Barbara Dahlman & Kyle Pierce

Open Sewing Circle at Monterey Library

You might be someone who mends or sews buttons back on favorite clothes. Or maybe you're crocheting, knitting, stitching, or embroidering something new.

It doesn't matter if you use a needle out of necessity or for pure delight. Come on down to the Open Sewing Circle at the Monterey Library from 10–11:30 a.m. on two Tuesday mornings this month, January 7 and January 21.

It's the time and the place for handwork and friendly faces. We're looking forward to seeing you.

If you'd like to be on the sewing circle's email contact list, call Mary Kate Jordan, 528-5557. If you wonder if the circle is meeting due to weather on a scheduled morning, call the library between 9 and 9:45 to see if the library is open.

—Mary Kate Jordan

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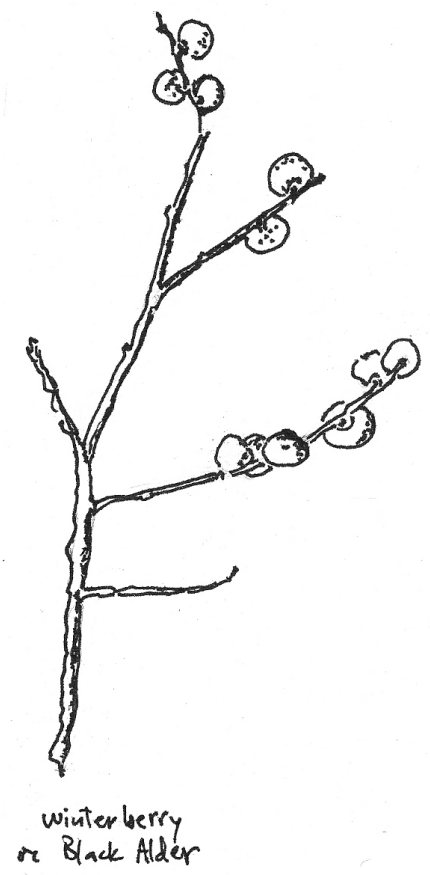
Black Alder, Local Holly in the Swamp

If we don't get lucky with snow and a moon, these new days of the year can be long and dark. The old Celts and druids celebrated Yule, and Romans the Saturnalia, or the turning of the sun, watching as Old Sol rose earlier, stayed longer, and the world began to warm up. They helped this along with songs and decorations, including "the holly and the ivy," also mistletoe. Sometimes singing such old songs can make us New Worlders feel a long way from the traditions, the roots. We do make wreaths and roping of our New England greens, but holly?

Yes, we have our own holly. This year it is particularly bright in the wet places, and many call it "winterberry." Bright red berries on dark shrubs. The leaves are gone and the swamps are cheering away with clouds of brilliant red. Come on, sun.

We may be used to the glossy, green, prickly-leaved holly of seasonal cards and florist shops, but our own red berries of the swamp are every bit a holly, too, and a real business has cropped up harvesting, selling, growing the winterberry or black alder. We called them black alders when I was little and the swamp here on east Lake Garfield has always been full of them. All hollies are members of the genus *Ilex,* but our local shrubby ones do not hang on to their leaves in winter, just the berries. In our family we have a Yule-time decorating tradition involving black-alder berry necklaces for the silver bird and blue ceramic seal that sit on our kitchen table.

Black alders are hollies, not alders. But *Ilex*, the Latin name for holly, was an old name for oaks, which are now called *Quercus*. There is a story there, for the researchers, but maybe the Indian name is of more interest: Yaupon, also Fever Bush. The leaves of a southern holly were dried and a tea concocted which contained caffeine and theobromine. These are also present in Yerba Maté, a South American drink found near the herbal teas in the New England grocery store. Maté, according to my old botanical guru Julia Ellen Rogers (born 1866),



is a holly once called Paraguay tea, "to which the people of South America are as addicted as North Americans are to tea and coffee." The leaves were dried and powdered and a tea prepared, which "has a remarkable stimulating effect upon the human system, fortifying it for incredible exertion and endurance. Indulged in to excess, it has much the same effect as alcohol" (*The Tree Book,* Doubleday Page &Company, NY, 1905). She writes that the Celtic sun god was called "Yaioul," and the original old solstice tradition "gave way" to the celebration of Christmas. I understand it to have been co-opted. The decorating *Ilex* plants became known as Christ Thorn or Christdorn, and later the "holy tree," or "holly."

Hollies are dioecious plants, which means literally there are two houses, one for males and one for females. In other words, the male and female blossoms occur on separate plants. They bloom in June and July, with small white flowers usually described as "inconspicuous." When the first heavy frost comes, the leaves blacken and drop, revealing fabulous red berries.

We love red in the cold dark times: look at the colors we wear in our scarves, jackets, wool socks. We head out to the swamp with clippers in the dark times, and some folks buy black alders or winterberries so they can plant them where they live, partly to offer berries to winter birds, but also to lift their own spirits with home-grown botanical Saturnalia.

—Bonner J. McAllester

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Thank You from the Bidwell House Museum

Thanks to this wonderful community, the Bidwell House Museum celebrated an excellent twenty-third season as a Berkshires historic site. Our workshops, history talks, and walks were very popular and drew visitors to the end of Art School Road all season. Many of you enjoyed the two fundraising parties and supported the museum with your financial contributions. Thank you!

We are particularly pleased to be able to offer programs for school children. Four Monterey youths won internships at the Bidwell House this summer: Joseph Makuc, Justin Makuc, Sheridan McAlister, and Madelinne Pope (granddaughter of Gige O'Connell).

A highlight of the year was Township No. 1 Day. On a glorious Saturday, July 6, many of you were among the over 250 people to visit the museum for the free community celebration of Monterey and Tyringham history. Much local talent was to be seen among the bakers and musicians. And thank you to Gould Farm for bringing animals for the kids, and the Monterey Historical Society for their exhibit of authentic arrowheads.

The Bidwell House Museum is grateful for the gifts of time, skills, and resources by members of the community. Whether as a volunteer with the Garden Angels, on a benefit committee, as a program participant, or on the board of directors, Monterey residents are the museum's strongest supporters. The museum could not thrive without you. Thanks go to the Monterey Cultural Council and the Select Board for your support of Township No. 1 Day, our programs, and interns. And a special thanks to the Monterey Highway Department: Art School Road is passable even on the stormiest days.

We are currently planning new programs for next summer. Do you have an idea for a talk or workshop? Please call me! While the building is closed until May, the Bidwell grounds are open for walking or snowshoeing all winter—come on up to enjoy the peace of the site.

With much gratitude,

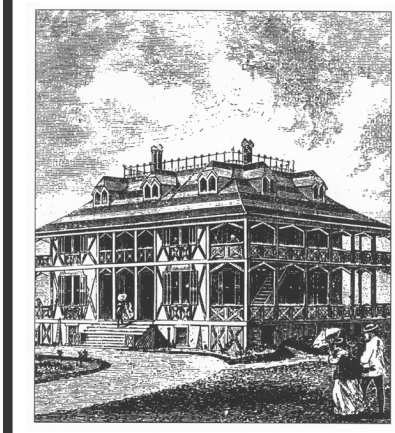
—Barbara Palmer
Executive Director

Monterey Library Notes

The fiber is on! Internet connectivity in Monterey is available at the Monterey Library with fiber speed. Having started at dial up, suffered through satellite, and made do with copper DSL, it is a pleasure to see speeds that make some parts of the Internet much more accessible. We are signed up for 5 and 5 as upload and download speeds—so the biggest difference from before is the upload speed.

In the library we have three public access computers as well as a laptop so you can do your Internet business. Most of the time we request that you limit yourself to 20 minutes on the library computers, but with four available machines there usually isn't a waiting line. The trustees have also tweaked the policy so that if you have a need for more time, just ask the staff and we will accommodate. We also have a wireless network that you can use your own devices on 24/7. The range is much greater than the physical building so we don't have to be open for you to take advantage of this free service.

—Mark Makuc, Library Director



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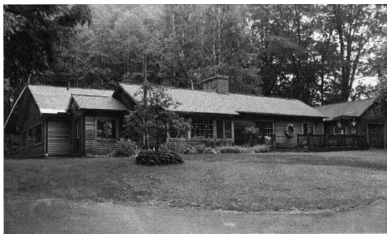

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An Unkindness of Ravens

Kyle Pierce is a Lake Buell resident who helps manage the Monterey General Store and also orchestrates the Wednesday night Community Potluck Suppers in the church basement. With an interest in wildlife, she reports frequently seeing ravens on her lakeshore property. The common raven is much larger than a crow, with a larger, heavier beak and shaggy feathers around the throat and above the beak. Its call is a distinctive deep, low guttural rattle, sometimes of a musical nature. In my opinion Kyle's ravens come down from a roost high up on the rocky ledges of nearby Dry Hill. There the prominent steep face towers toward Lake Buell, just as the nesting crags of Monument Mountain look back from the other direction.

In talking about ravens Kyle loaned me her book entitled *An Exaltation of Larks, or The Venereal Game* by James Lipton, published by Grossman Publishers of New York in 1968. Venereal terms for groups of wildlife are word games and collective animated nouns derived from perceived habits and observed behavior. (The game is *venereal* because it was originally invented as an exclusive jargon by huntsmen [Latin *venari*, to hunt].) Lipton also goes further by cleverly inventing similar collective labels for people using a similar criterion.

Wildlife Venereal
A Gaggle of Geese
A Plague of Locusts
A Parliament of Owls
A Murder of Crows
An Exaltation of Larks

Human Venereal
An Eloquence of Lawyers
A Wince of Dentists
A Worship of Writers
A Flush of Plumbers
An Odium of Politicians

A flock of ravens can have three different venereal nomenclatures, such as a Conspiracy when they bunch up like crows in winter or a gathering he calls an Unkindness to scold and hassle a predator, as in my illustration. The third is a Constable referring to those keeping watch over the Tower of London, from a romantic Victorian legend that England would never fall to an invader while they hold court there, and they do to this very day

The raven is a passerine species that evolved in the Old World. The earliest record is found in the Judeo-Christian tradition, where we read that a raven was the first creature to be released

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from Noah's Ark (Genesis 8:7), followed by a dove to see if the waters had receded. Ravens came to this continent across the Bering land bridge like the first Native Americans. In their journey through literature, they left a lasting treasure trove of folklore in the works of Shakespeare, Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens, J. R. R. Tolkien, Stephen King, and Jane Aiken.

Considered to be of high intelligence with brains the largest of any bird species, ravens perform remarkable feats of problem solving, collecting sticks as tools and dropping stones at invaders of the realm of their nesting sites. They also mimic sounds of the environment, including human speech, with wide variations of vocalization for social interaction. They are also entertaining with their flight aerobatics.

With their large size and intelligence, ravens may live twenty years because they have few predators. The one exception is the snowy owl, which didn't need J. K. Rowling to make it a symbol of magic. Long before they appeared in Harry Potter, Native Americans called them the Ghost Owl and Terror of the North. Today snowy owls are becoming prolific here and along coastlines, and like geese they can be a peril to planes at municipal airports.

As different from the raven as night and day, snowy owls are direct opposites on the bleak black-and-white landscape of the winter months.

—George B. Emmons

From the Meetinghouse . . .

The thought came with a quick glance at one of the car's mirrors: *Where did <u>that</u> road come from?* I was on familiar terrain: Route 102 between Stockbridge and South Lee, but I was driving a rented car. The rental was lots wider than my usual vehicle, so maybe that's why the strange view from the passenger-side mirror really caught my attention.

Yup, it was the mirror with the printed warning: *Items seen in mirror are closer than they appear.* But what stood out in that glance was how utterly different the road I'd just passed over appeared there from the landscape I thought I'd just traveled. Proportions were different; "off" somehow, in the same way the proportions are "off" in the elongated figures in an El Greco painting. Each was completely right within context: the painting's frame, the mirror's edges, and both disconcerting next to the real world. Or at least, next to the world I think I know.

You know it too: the regular, familiar world. The predictable, the humdrum, the blessedly mundane, sometimes stiflingly secure, world. It's the world most prone to falling apart if not controlled or especially if subject to extremely rigorous control: the world defined by linear mind.

That could be my linear mind or yours; I sure don't have a lock on too much thinking. Nothing wrong with thinking, of course. It's one of the important ways we navigate the world we experience with our senses. That's our shared world, the world at the core of Stephen King's successful and powerful career. First he finds some of its humdrum, mundane details—a spider, a sneeze, the need for shelter in a snowstorm. Then he filters them through his own way of thinking into words, and worlds, we just might find plausible.

King's words achieve a rather different disconcerting effect from the one El Greco's images provide. Yet both communicate to us something about what is seen in the mirrors of each man's mind. Like the road I saw in that car mirror, each man's work can have a startling impact on any of us, as reader, as viewer.

Bio details reveal that when Stephen King was very young he and a friend went to play on some (forbidden, of course) railroad tracks. His friend was killed. Young Stephen did not speak a word for days afterward. A glance at El Greco's bio reveals that he was trained as an artist by Greek Orthodox iconographers. A glance at his work revels the same elongation and flattening of figures common to those Eastern icons in his painting in Spain.

That's not to say that King has had no uplifting experience, nor that El Greco survived no trauma. It's just interesting to be aware that some experiences held in the mirrors of their minds colored the way they express themselves. And interesting to become aware of, even to name, some of our own.

Hmmmm: Where <u>did</u> that road come from?

—Mary Kate Jordan

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The Center of My Mat

A yoga studio opened in my previous building last January. In the dead of winter, running outside was fairly unpleasant, so this new venue piqued my curiosity. In addition to exercise, I was looking for some activity that was unrelated to my professional world or future academic pursuits. I needed a different dynamic in my life to change the rather pronounced monotony I felt at the time.

I was a yoga novice, but I had a hunch that I would improve with practice. I walked up to the counter, and a young woman with a cheerful and engaging demeanor, covered in tattoos, made me feel instantly at home. Her class, the first I took, was a rigorous flow, with one breath for every movement, but I left feeling calm, healthy, and focused. It turns out that it's difficult to be bad at yoga, although one can always improve, especially with caring and supportive instructors. I signed up for the introduction month at a discount rate shortly thereafter, and as I took different classes with a range of instructors, I could feel the subtle changes in my body—greater flexibility and strength, and then, more surprising, a gradual mental shift. I felt more and more at home in the studio community. All of the instructors prioritize their students' physical and mental health and wellbeing; they are all committed to providing a warm and peaceful space for us to come to so we can let go of the world around us and come back to a place of centeredness.

First, I should confess that I was not expecting to become a yogi—although I know others who swear by the practice. My initial intent was simply to exercise and stay out of the elements and introduce a new element into my life. Yet, after about three weeks, something unexpected happened—I started to open up to the possibility of the more spiritual side of yoga. It's hard to explain, and I remain devoutly agnostic, but when I come to the center of my mat and set my intention at the beginning of my practice, it clears my mind of everything else in life. As someone who is exceedingly prone to self-criticism, my long-standing intention connects to the theme of self-kindness (practicing kindness toward myself) and self-acceptance. Remarkably, over the months, I have noticed a distinct shift in my approach to life situations; I respond to external stimuli differently.

The studio is not intensely spiritual, and there is space for all individuals of different beliefs and religious backgrounds. But you are encouraged to make that element of the yoga tradition your own and to simply be open to whatever you feel and wherever your mind takes you. I believe the practice of yoga, with its unity of movement and breath, is beneficial regardless of where your mind goes. But practicing openness, and learning more about the yoga philosophy can be influential. Faith and belief are a part of the human experience, and I suspect that yoga may be a fundamental part of my spiritual journey—one I am just beginning to explore.

In early May, the studio announced it would be offering thirty- and sixty-day yoga challenges over the summer. If you did thirty classes in thirty days, you would get fifteen days of free classes in August; sixty classes in as many days would garner you the whole month of August free. Needless to say, I was intrigued, and not just because of the free yoga. By then, I was already going to the studio for about ten to twelve classes a week, so the challenge did not seem that far out of reach. Still, if you missed a day, you would have to make that class up sometime. My roommates can vouch for the fact that I took three classes in a row at least three or four times. It was an intense two months, but I finished two days early, triumphant with a huge sense of accomplishment. It was my first nonprofessional or nonacademic goal in years, and I did it for myself, no one else. I suppose you could say I owned the entire experience.

Over the past year, I have worked diligently in the studio and I have learned to listen to my body. Being in harmony and listening to signals, when to push yourself or when to relax and breathe, translates into the daily world around you. I do many different classes: vinyasa flow, hot Hatha, Ashtanga, Pilates, as well as Yoga Nidra (guided meditation). My practice has advanced significantly, and

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right now I am working on my unsupported headstands. Although I still go to the gym a few times a week for a cardio workout, I often close my day with a few relaxation poses to decompress and improve my quality of sleep.

In addition to successfully completing the yoga challenge, I also purchased an annual membership. Although I no longer live in that building, I am still nearby, and I found a real community that provides a sense of belonging. I did not expect this journey a year ago, with all the resulting changes and opportunities that came with it. In a city like Washington, always fast moving and always demanding, it is important to have ways to let go, physically and mentally. As I look back at this past year, joining the studio and learning to come to the center of my mat has been a defining life event, one that I hope will stay with me for years to come.

As my favorite instructor often says (along with many of the others), "The light within me honors the light in each and every one of you." Wishing you all a Happy New Year, Namaste.

—Tarsi Dunlop

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You're OK

We are reminded all the time that what we have in the U.S. is a "sick care" system. That is because most health care resources are directed toward treating people once they get sick. This is largely true even when you consider all the attention paid to preventing illness and disability. There is, however, one aspect of health care that, although a crucial component, rarely receives any consideration. Let's call it our "reassurance system." What it costs us no one has calculated. Just what it's worth I'll let you decide.

Admittedly, most all of us adults worry in varying degrees about our health. I am not talking about hypochondriacs—they will always be with us. I am referring to people who are more aware and informed than ever before, who recognize that because lots of dangers lurk out there, they are vulnerable. They understand, moreover, that our bodies normally warn us when something is amiss and that it's wise not to ignore unusual symptoms, especially if they persist. What that does, of course, is encourage people to be on the alert, to pay attention to whatever bodily irregularities they detect.

Still, most people experiencing physical discomfort will tend to shrug it off. "It's nothing," they will tell you. Persistent headaches or coughing, a sore throat that does not heal, periodic chest discomfort, recurrent fatigue, stool discoloration, blurred vision, weight loss, a growth on the skin, episodes of chills—these and other symptoms will likely be minimized or explained away. But, typically, this outward absence of concern masks a growing anxiety.

Nevertheless, they are too fearful to get themselves checked out by a doctor. Maybe it will go away. Or if it's not formally diagnosed then it doesn't exist. Weeks, months can go by. Meanwhile the symptoms persist, which makes them increasingly apprehensive. By now they are worried sick; sure it's cancer, heart disease, a brain tumor, a lung ailment, etc. Others urge them to make a doctor's appointment, but they discover reasons why it's not convenient: the holidays are upon us; they have an important project to complete; they're going on vacation; the family is coming for a visit. Anyway, the symptoms seem to have abated.

Finally, they are out of excuses; the uncertainty and fear have become unbearable. So they make that appointment and gird themselves for the expected bad news. They are examined, submit to a few tests, and then a day or two later hear the doctor declare, "There is nothing to worry about," and explain the source of those troubling symptoms.

The months of worrying, the sense of impending doom—none of this need to have happened. The torture was self-inflicted, but replaced now by an extraordinary feeling of relief, even euphoria. They can go on with their lives!

So, credit our medical system, not with a miracle cure, but with daily doses of much-needed reassurance for millions of people. Now, what's that worth?

—Richard Skolnik

Richard blogs at www.catchmydrift.net.

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December Wildlife: New Snow, Deer Tracks—and Bears!

In the middle of last month we got a little snow, letting us in on the night visitors around Monterey. Carol Ingher saw deer tracks down near Lake Buel, as did Will Marsh on River Road. Will and Glynis also had a deer in their yard. We got three different bear track reports, thanks to the good tracking conditions: John Marion on Cronk Road; Lanny Lanoue on Sandisfield Road, whose birdfeeder was ravaged; and then right here on East Hupi Road I got a call from Bob Carlson and we went out on skis to follow the bear tracks he had spotted up behind his place. The tracks went right up the Cobble (Hunger Mountain) very steeply and I told Bob I had seen bear droppings up there on the top in the fall. We decided not to pursue our large neighbor further.

There was another kind of bear, much closer to our house, during the warm weather before Christmas. It was a woolly bear caterpillar, trundling along our path, emerged from its hibernation. Also emerged during that time was a salamander that showed up on the "boot tray" at the Banners' place on Griswold Road. Mike took it out and "buried it alive" in the nicely thawed compost pile. Though it had spots, it was not a "Spotted Salamander" but a red eft, which is spotted, too.

The warm weather put me so much in the mood for spring that I believed I saw an actual spotted salamander on the Tyringham Road, late in the day on that warm, wet December 22nd. By the time I'd found a turning-around place and gone back, the creature was gone, crawled on off the dangerous road. If it was ever there in the first place . . . This was a "wildlife sighting" . . . ?

Also on that big day, December 22nd, Bruce and Masho McAlister saw a set of deer antlers on the ground at the Coddington's place on the more eastern Tyringham Road, the one that is a sort of continuation of Town Hill Road, West Otis, and goes from Route 23 over to the Tyringham valley. These antlers were those of a nine-point buck.

Steve McAlister saw a moose on Cronk Road in December, the only one reported so far.

Will and Glynis Marsh have had many turkeys in the yard, also a pair of cardinals which are regulars at the feeder, and chickadees, nuthatches, and two kinds of woodpeckers: downy and hairy. On December 12, Will saw a red fox on Alford Road in Great Barrington, near Division Street.

Larry Burke

Larry Burke's blue jays

In the blue jay department, we have a report from Larry Burke in New Marlborough, also a photo. He says they have plenty of jays this winter, and I can report the same here in East Monterey, unlike last winter, when we had not a one.

Thanks, everyone, for your observations and sightings.

—Bonner McAllester
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Recent Acquisitions at Monterey Library

Below is a sample of recent new material in the Monterey Library in months. Come in and browse. These books and movies are newly released and in high demand by all users of CWMARS. If you'd like to borrow them you will probably need to place a hold on them through your CWMARS account, or you can call the library (528-3795) or come by during open hours.

A list of new titles at the Monterey Library is now available online at the CWMARS site (http://www.cwmars.org/new_titles). Just click on Monterey Library.

DVD

Wolverine (PG-13)
Men at Lunch (DOC)
Night Train to Lisbon (R)
Veggie Tales, All the Shows, Vol. 2 (Y)
Jobs (Bio-Pic)
The Watsons go to Birmingham (TV-PG)
Mary Poppins (G)

Adult Fiction

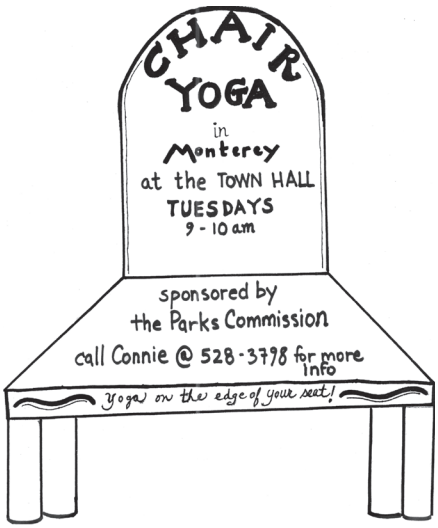
Light of the World, James Lee Burke

Adult Nonfiction

The Art of French Pastry, Jacquy Pfeiffer
Melt: The Art of Macaroni and Cheese, Stephanie Stiavetti
Slow Reading in a Hurried Age, David Mikics

Audio Books

The Edge of Normal, Carla Norton



Remembering Linda Beth Ross

Linda Beth Ross, 54, of Pleasant Street in Great Barrington, passed away Tuesday, December 10, 2013, in Pittsfield after a long, brave and heroic battle with cancer.

Born on April 18, 1959, in New York, she was the daughter of Stanley and Edith Ross of Monterey. She graduated from Syosset High School, Syosset, NY, in 1977 and received her BA in Fine Arts from Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, in 1985.

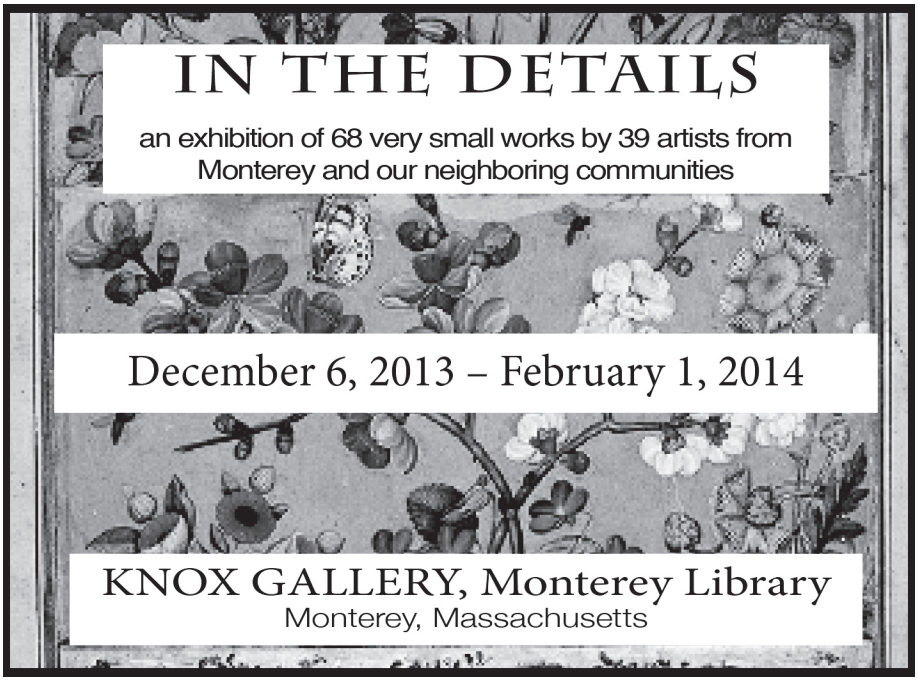
Linda had a passion for life in all its aspects. She was forever devoted to her sons and her family.

She worked in the film industry in New York and Los Angeles for many years before moving to the Berkshires in 2009. She loved vintage perfumes and worked as a private curator and consultant for clients around the world.

Linda is survived by her two sons David Louis Danza, 23, and Alexander Jordan Danza, 18, of Great Barrington, along with her parents, Stanley Irwin Ross and Edith Renee Ross, of Monterey; her sister, Beth Ann Ross, of San Francisco, CA; her brother, Richard Stewart Ross, of Los Angeles, CA; her cousin Jay Arthur Nadelson of Punta Gorda, FL; her nieces, Maia Felice Ross Trupin, Clara Owen Ross, and Frances Sequoia Ross; her nephew, Elias William Ross Trupin; her sisters-in-law, Laura Susan Trupin and Kristina Lerman; her cherished dog Targhee; and her many, many friends.

A memorial service to celebrate her life will be held in the spring in Monterey.

Memorial donations in her memory to help fund lung cancer research may be sent to The National Cancer Institute Gift Fund through Finnerty & Stevens Funeral Home, 426 Main St., Great Barrington, MA 01230, or http://obf.cancer.gov/contribute/giftfund.htm.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Remembering Monterey in 1950s

To the Editor

Monterey today and the studio tour sound so wonderful and so unlike my childhood summers at Camp Owaissa on Lake Garfield in the 1950s, well, actually through the summer of 1961, which was still much like the '50s. We would return every summer expecting everything to be the same—and it was, at least to our eyes. In those slower, quieter days, the Tryon sisters, who were quite on in years, or so I thought, had a charming ice-cream parlor across from the General Store/Post Office with a couple of gas pumps in front. Their rival, with a small, sparse interior but a parrot to attract children and lower prices for ice cream if you were satisfied with the more limited selection, also had gasoline pumps out front; it was just up the road (Route 23) toward Otis. The General Store was a general store and next to it was the library. The church was on the left corner of the T intersection of Tyringham Road and Route 23 as we headed into town on the hikes from camp, which we looked forward to every summer.

Each year I made the trek, and, whether as a camper or a very young counselor, I wanted to but never did go into the pristine white library set back from the road with that inviting deep green lawn, which I could see after passing the worn, dark red barn built right up to the road on our right just before entering the smallest town I had any connection to. Oh, the barn was where the cows—whose milk we drank at camp we were told—went after crossing the asphalt road from their pasture on the same side as and beyond the church. I remember thinking this was really the country when the barn was this close to town and the cows could cross a main road—and when it seemed to take forever for the cows to reach the barn.

Years later when I was a counselor and drove up to camp, I could not help chuckling when I noticed the sign on Route 23 as I was heading toward the center of Monterey from Great Barrington: it said Slow Populated Area, or something to that effect. To me, Monterey was this tiny, sleepy village, which I would miss if I blinked; no one was ever outside when we hiked there or when I drove through, so it was hard for me to think of it being a populated part of the world. The people were inside even in nice weather it seemed; the cows were on the road!

Adding to this sense of tranquility were moments sitting below Inspiration Rock looking out over the calm waters of Lake Garfield, cantering along one of the narrow dirt roads that went through the woods circling Lake Garfield, pumping drinking water into a container like in the Westerns on black and white TV, and lying on the deserted public beach on our days off when we were counselors my last two summers in Monterey.

Camp was another world—one that was separate from reality, and in those days so was Monterey for city and suburban children. It wasn't that the adults sheltered us—we competed against other girls' camps in sports, had socials with boys' camps, went to the bird sanctuary, and, if the Mahaiwe in Great Barrington screened an appropriate movie such as *Lady and the Tramp*, we would have a field trip there, followed by a stop at Friendly's, where it was always tough deciding between an Awful-Awful and a chocolate marshmallow sundae! We were exposed to high and not-so-high culture on day trips to Tanglewood to hear the Boston Symphony or Boston Pops play the *1812 Overture*; to Jacobs Pillow to see Merce Cunningham or Eric Bruhn with the Royal Danish Ballet; to Stockbridge and Williamstown summer stock; and to the Music Barn, where I first heard the Kingston Trio and Ahmad Jamal.

No, we weren't isolated; we created in our minds this ideal existence where we left behind all the worries of growing up in an adult world and formed friendships that lasted for many, many years. The town of Monterey, like the Gingerbread House in Tyringham, fit right into this childhood version of Shangri-la.

Even though camps Owaissa and Monterey, the boys camp, are long gone from the shores of Lake Garfield, learning that Monterey now has a cadre of artists is tempting me to return for a visit this summer, were it only closer to Washington, DC.

—Jo-Ann Neuhaus,
Camp Owaissa, July & August, 1953–1961

Contributors

Thanks to the following folks for their recent contributions. We are grateful for your support of our community newspaper.

Pat Salomon & Julio Rodriguez
Judith Friedman
Louise Amstead
Richard Skolnik
John Callahan
Glenn Heller

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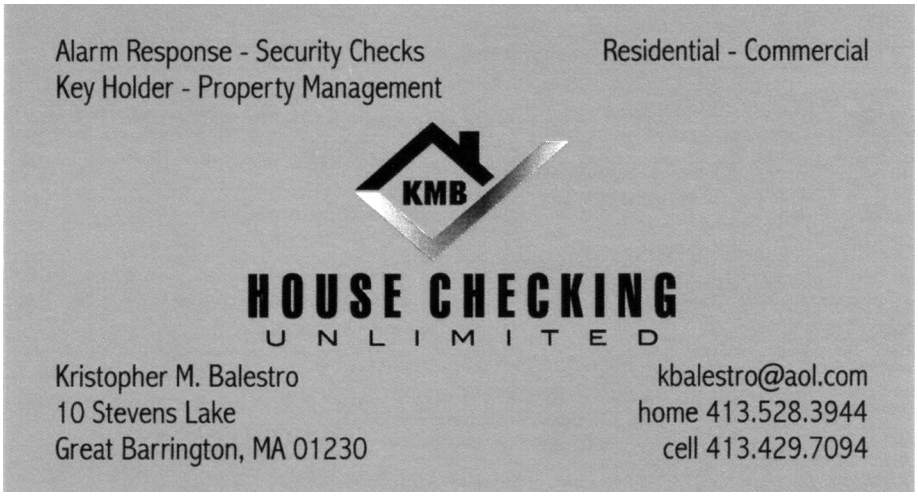
An email PDF of each month's *Monterey News* is now available. If you would like to receive a copy in this format of each month's issue as it appears, email us at montereynews9@gmail.com and we will add you to the electronic mailing list. If you are currently receiving the hard copy, please indicate whether or not you want to continue receiving that as well.



Calendar

Every Monday except holidays: Select Board meeting, Town Hall, 9 a.m.

Through February 1: *In the Details*, an exhibition of small works by local artists in various materials, Knox Gallery, Monterey Library, during library hours.

Every Tuesday: Chair Yoga with Connie Wilson, 9–10 a.m., Monterey Town Hall. Free, sponsored by Monterey Park Commission.

Tuesdays, January 7 and 21: Open Sewing Circle, 10–11:30 a.m., Monterey Library. See p. 13.

Thursday, January 9: Free Blood Pressure Clinic with Visiting Nurses Assoc., 2–3 p.m., Town Hall Meeting Room.

Wednesday, January 15:

Community Potluck Dinner, 6 p.m., Monterey Meetinghouse Fellowship Hall. Barbara Swann will entertain with an anecdote from Monterey's past. Everyone welcome; see p. 13.

Open burning season opens. See p. 6 for new permit procedure.

Monday, January 20: Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Town Hall, Library closed.

Saturday, January 18: Lenox Contradance. Live music by the Russet Trio, calling by Sara Van Norstrand; dancing 8 to 11:30. All welcome; new dancers come at 8; all dances walked through. Lenox Community Center, 65 Walker St, www.lenoxcontradance.org, 413-528-4007.

Tuesday, January 28: Public meeting with town officials to discuss pending major town projects such as library renovations, Monterey School, and Wilson McLaughlin House repairs, 7 p.m., Town Hall. See p. 3.

Monday, January 27: Adult book group will discuss *March Violets* by Philip Kerr, 7:30 p.m., Monterey Library. Newcomers welcome.

Friday, February 7: Art Exhibit *Pauline Nault: Mere Color Moves* opens, Knox Gallery, Monterey Library.

Monday February, 17: Annual Town Skating Party and Chili Cook-off, 1–3 p.m., Firehouse Pavilion. See p. 12.

Monterey News

The Monterey News is an independent nonprofit corporation dedicated to fostering communication in the Monterey community. Our editorial address is PO Box 9, Monterey, MA, 01245. We invite signed letters, articles, drawings, poetry, and photographs. Submissions may also be sent to the email address below. Address requests for advertising rates and further information to the Editor, or telephone us at 413-528-4347 or email montereynews9@gmail.com.

The Observer
November 26 – December 25

High temp. (12/23) ..... 63°
Low temp. (12/17) ..... -5°
Avg. high temp. ..... 35.1°
Avg. low temp. ..... 18.5°
Avg. temp. ..... 26.8°
Total precipitation
(rain and melted snow) ..... 4.67 in.
Snowfall ..... 20.2 in.
Precipitation occurred on 20 days.

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(for marriage licenses, death & birth certificates, census, dog licenses)
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Contributions from local artists this month:
Maureen Banner, 13. 20, 21; George Emmons, 16;
Tristian Goik, 15;Bonner McAllester, 14.

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